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Going Beyond Temporary Measures

A way forward for refugee livelihood programming in southeastern Turkey

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Recommendations

\ Create more coordinated livelihood programmes

The number of beneficiaries is not an indicator of the quality of programmes. Short-term measures that try to reach large number of people, such as cash assistance, create dependency and cannot enhance sustainable livelihoods. If applied, they need to be embedded within long-term approaches. Different livelihood programmes, from vocational trainings to work programmes, should thus build on, rather than compete with, each other as well as take into account the existing skills of refugees.

\ Provide on-the-job, market-aligned and innovative livelihood trainings

Job opportunity is one of the main reasons, next to security and social ties, why people move to the southeast of Turkey. This suggests that incentives for employers to hire refugees should be increased. The way forward includes measures to build databases on demand and supply, to assist the development and implementation of business plans in collaboration with refugees, and to roll out market-aligned trainings. At least six months on-the-job trainings can, furthermore, establish trust between employer and employee as well as lead to long-term contracts that will stabilize the livelihoods of refugees.

\ Foster outreach activities to raise awareness and transparency

Many refugees, aid agencies and local authorities have no or misleading information about the livelihood activities being offered locally, a situation that causes frustration and mistrust. Fostering more exchange between national and local bureaus of authorities and aid organizations can increase transparency. Livelihood programmes should also extend their reach to non-Syrian refugee groups, local communities and those outside of community centres to prevent resentment between groups.

Going Beyond Temporary Measures

Turkey is the largest refugee¹ recipient country worldwide. In February 2017, the government of Turkey's Directorate General of Migration (DGMM) estimated that almost 3,200,000 refugees are registered in Turkey, of which around 2,900,000 are Syrians. With the EU-Turkey deal that was signed in March 2016, Turkey pledges to take every Syrian who has irregularly migrated to Greece from Turkey. In return, Europe undertakes to resettle one Syrian from Turkey for every returnee, an arrangement known as the "one-to-one initiative". However, several European Union (EU) member states have been reluctant to accept any more refugees on their territory. Despite recent peace talks in Geneva in February and March of this year, the conflict in Syria shows no signs of ending soon. Consequently, the refugees' chances of finding durable solutions remain slim. Besides hoping to get one of the few resettlement spots or finding illegal ways to move towards Europe, most Syrian refugees can only try to build a livelihood within Turkey. Yet, how can they sustain their livelihoods within Turkey and what can aid organizations do to help?

Although the Syrian conflict is already in its sixth year, most international and local aid organizations have only very recently started livelihood programming. In 2016, the livelihoods sector was the least funded one within the framework of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP).² In the southeast of Turkey, international aid organizations have mainly focused on cross-border activities into Syria. Many aid organizations have assumed that Turkey will manage the refugee influx on its own, given that Turkey is a middle income country. Moreover, until around mid-2012 the Turkish government had placed restrictions on international non-governmental organizations for operations within Turkey. It is only since European countries had their own experience of large-scale refugee flows in the autumn of 2015, and the Balkan route was closed in March 2016

leaving refugees stranded at its borders, that the EU has been paying more attention to how refugees in neighbouring states, like Turkey, of countries in conflict can be assisted. Ultimately, the aim of the EU is to prevent further movement towards Europe.

Against the backdrop of rising incidents of human rights violations within Turkey (Human Rights Watch, 2017) and the Turkish constitutional referendum in April 2017, EU member states have now started asking more questions about the livelihood situation of refugees within Turkey.

This *Policy Brief* presents ways of enhancing livelihood programming in Turkey in order to foster self-reliance of refugees and sustain their livelihoods.³ Access to sustainable livelihoods for refugees is essential to mitigate the risk of impoverishment, prevent protracted poverty and avoid renewed displacement of refugees.⁴ The *Policy Brief* is based on preliminary findings of the author's field research over a two-month period in the autumn and winter of 2016. It focuses on Gaziantep and Hatay in the southeast of Turkey as most refugees live there. This research is embedded in the framework of the project "Protected rather than Protracted: Strengthening Refugees and Peace", funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The author undertook around 30 expert interviews from 22 different international organizations (IOs) and NGOs. In addition, 17 semi-structured in-depth narrative interviews, mainly with impoverished⁵ Syrian individuals living in urban surroundings, were conducted to identify their livelihood perspectives and coping strategies, as well as to analyse their relationship with local communities.⁶ Over 90 per cent of refugees in Turkey live outside camps.

1 \ I use the term "refugee" here, although Turkey itself does not consider Syrians "refugees" because of the geographical limitation to the Refugee Convention. See further down.

2 \ "A regionally coordinated plan composed of country chapters developed under the leadership of national authorities with support from the United Nations and NGOs in each country" (UNHCR, 2017).

3 \ "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation" (Chambers, R., & Conway, G.R., 1991).

4 \ For the risks of impoverishment, see Cernea, M. M. 2000.

5 \ There are, of course, also Syrians that are not impoverished and self-reliant, but they are not the focus of this study.

6 \ My thanks go to the respondents and translators who helped to facilitate the interviews and to the organizations that provided access to their projects or assisted with contacts.

Sustainable livelihoods need approaches that go beyond temporary measures

While the government of Turkey and the largest Turkish humanitarian organization, the Turkish Red Crescent, have been very engaged in assisting Syrians in the last few years,⁷ several refugees reported in November 2016 that they felt ignored by them and by other aid organizations. At the beginning of the Syrian conflict in 2011, Turkey welcomed refugees with an open-door policy. Yet since November 2015, it has largely closed its border to Syria and even half-finished a project to build a wall. Turkey has also maintained that a geographical limitation applies to the 1951 Refugee Convention so that Syrians should not be considered as refugees; rather, because they did not flee from Europe, they are to be referred to as “guests”. This approach hinders long-term solutions, such as local integration. Although Syrians were granted “temporary protection” status with the introduction of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2014, the very title of “temporary” demonstrates that their stay is treated and thought of as only temporary. There seems to be no interest in putting long-term strategies in place. This is also reflected in the livelihood programming of local, but also international actors, towards refugees, which directly influences their livelihood situation. While international donors have increased their aid, it does not seem to be effective to the extent that it fails to reach all groups and is not, for the most part, aligned to long-term strategies. Without the latter, however, refugees will be forced to move again and will stay impoverished, for they will not have any additional assets or be able to rely on social networks for assistance.

The short-term approach of several aid organization is reflected in the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), a cash card programme that was launched in November 2016. Funded by the EU with a grant of 348 million

euros, the programme is implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) in collaboration with the Turkish Ministry of Family and Social Policy and the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD). This programme does partly empower refugees as they can freely decide how to spend their money. It envisages targeting 20,000 Syrian families by mid-2017, which is said to be the equivalent of one million individuals. However, the ESSN also creates dependencies and does not generate sustainable livelihoods. Although the card is topped up monthly with 100 Turkish lira (TRY) (around 26 euros in March 2017), it is not even enough to pay rent and will run out in a couple of months if funding is not extended. Syrian refugees in Gaziantep paid, for example, for a simple single-room apartment alone around 300 TRY, a sum which does not yet include heating costs. This shortfall forces several families to live together without any privacy. Due to high demand in housing, landlords can often demand exorbitant rents, as reported by many Syrians as well as NGO and IO officers. Moreover, while one million refugees are targeted by the fund, at least two million are not, a situation that creates tensions between recipients and non-recipients.

Several Syrian refugees stated that they were struggling to survive with no regular or short-term income and were not at all equipped for any “shocks” as they cannot save any money. Yet for livelihoods to be sustainable, they need to be resistant to shocks or otherwise risk impoverishment. Refugees are thus forced to move to find other livelihood opportunities somewhere else, despite their strong desire for stability after unsettling or even traumatic past experiences within Syria. Although cash assistance might stimulate the local market, cash assistance can only temporarily alleviate the livelihood situation of refugees. Short-term measures alone cannot be the solution for enhancing the livelihoods of refugees. They need to be embedded in and complemented by long-term approaches to be effective.

Another issue is that, within the ESSN, refugees with work permits are not eligible for cash assistance. Syrian refugees have, since January 2016, officially been

7 \ The government of Turkey stated in October 2016 that it had spent over US \$12 billion on assistance to Syrians since the beginning of the crisis (UNHCR, 2017a).

able to work through the introduction of the Regulation on the Work Permit of Foreigners under Temporary Protection by the Turkish government. Although they should be paid at least the minimum wage, Syrian refugees are paid often much less than their Turkish co-workers with similar qualifications and therefore also cannot sustain their livelihoods. As a 29-year-old Syrian man reported, he feels “exploited like a slave”. To increase their income, some refugees therefore turn to negative coping strategies such as child labour or early marriage as one salary alone is not sufficient. Yet finding any regular and stable jobs is currently very difficult in Turkey, particularly as the unemployment rate rose to 12.01 per cent by November 2016. Among young people, it is even higher. As one NGO worker states: “Trading with Syria has stopped, tourism has stopped and thus, income to the city is low and there are few job opportunities”. Interviewees therefore mentioned job opportunity as one of the primary reasons for moving within Turkey, along with security concerns and social ties. Yet Syrian refugees can only apply for a work permit six months after their registration and in the city they first registered. Indeed, registration has been delayed or even stopped since the autumn of 2016, as several interviewees reported, leaving Syrian refugees with waits before they can officially work even if their ID card was issued on time. So refugees are seeking jobs in the informal sector, which makes them even more susceptible to exploitation, including excessive working hours of eleven hours a day.

Livelihood programmes should be interconnected and based on local market needs

The long and irregular working hours were cited by refugees as a reason why they are not able to take part in language courses or vocational activities. They simply have no time and energy left. Yet, the lack of language and other skills is often a barrier to finding a more secure job. There are community centres for refugees within city neighbourhoods that are run by international aid organizations and offer language and vocational trainings, including accounting, marketing or hairdressing, but their opening hours are

too short and rigid for many refugees to attend. Moreover, the shortage of child care places prevents women from attending vocational trainings. But even those refugees who completed vocational trainings were not necessarily able to find a regular job afterwards or, indeed, any job at all. Even though international and local aid organizations steadily try to increase their number of “beneficiaries”, too little emphasis is placed on the quality of livelihood programmes, such as vocational trainings. There is insufficient planning and assessments up front, and a lack of programme evaluations and follow-ups afterwards. The trainings on offer do not necessarily fit the local market. Market assessments are thus crucial components of livelihood programming. A good example of how this can be done was the case of training in using a software programme required by a firm which ended with a refugee getting the job. However, basic techniques on mobile phone usage that were taught in some community centres were considered by some interviewees not to be enough to keep up with the ever changing and competing market. Trainings also need to include more diverse and innovative approaches that fit with and foster the local market as well as build on the existing skills of refugees. A way forward is a multi-phase livelihood approach being implemented by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in Hatay. A strong focus is placed first on identifying the existing skills and priorities of refugees through livelihood counselling so that they can then be presented with options for developing and transferring skills. Follow-up trainings and job placements will come next. Unfortunately, many of the trainings offered by aid agencies do not have these follow-up components, making it difficult for refugees, even those with extensive skills, to find a job because they may not have the contacts to Turkish employers or know about job offers.

A further problem is that Turkish employers often lack the incentive to hire Syrians or even do not know about the availability of qualified staff. Databases of the refugees’ skills and the job opportunities need to be developed and upgraded so that both sides, demand and supply, can find each other. While job fairs have been organized by aid organizations and

some Turkish employers expressed a wish to hire refugees, in practice Turkish employers often fail to show up at the job fairs or do not hire refugees out of fear of being publicly shamed by their Turkish friends or the Turkish public. Databases should thus be anonymous, trust must be built between groups and incentives strengthened for Turkish employers. A way forward is to provide on-the-job training for at least six months. Such schemes can, first, offer “hands on” training, second, establish trust between employer and employee and, third, lead to more long-term employment contracts with refugees. Effective incentives have occurred in cases where an aid organization pays the first few months a refugee’s salary while the employer has to hire the refugee for at least a year. There are also some equally promising examples of good practice: the IOM’s in-kind grant programme, which builds on existing skills and the entrepreneurship of refugees; and a local NGO’s continuously adaptive approach based on discussions with the refugees on how trainings can be improved after each term; and those livelihood programmes in which business plans are discussed and developed together with refugees. Nevertheless, most livelihood programmes still do not embed their trainings within larger job placement programs. They are not interconnected but, rather, compete with each other; sometimes programmes by the same donor even compete. It is also found that many aid organizations do not engage with refugees and local communities when designing or seeking to improve programmes. Refugees are often still seen only as “recipients”, as the term “beneficiary” demonstrates. Organizations must realise that refugees can be active agents who can help construct programmes and become entrepreneurs.

Foster outreach activities and coordination to prevent misinformation and mistrust

Many refugees are, furthermore, not even reached by livelihood programmes. Several refugees interviewed did not even know about the community centres or courses offered because aid organizations have not conducted any outreach activities or cut back on such activities. Moreover, some refugees said they felt hesitant to leave their apartment because of traumatic experiences in the past. An elderly Syrian woman, for example, stated that she does not like to interact with others and thus rarely goes outside. Consequently, not all information reaches her and other refugees. In addition, assessments on livelihoods are mostly conducted with refugees already benefitting from programmes within community, but this might not necessarily reflect the situation of the wider refugee community. While outreach activities have been restricted lately by local government officials, reflecting the government’s mistrust towards aid organizations, programmes can only be effective by including all the different refugee groups and thus mitigating tensions among them. For example, confused by the lack of information and transparency, some refugees did not understand why some received assistance and others did not. The prominent focus of aid agencies on Syrian refugees has also created a feeling of neglect among other refugee groups such as Afghans and among poorer Turkish communities.

The problem of missing information and misinformation has directly affected the livelihood situation of refugees and local communities. Due to the fact that policies have been constantly changing, especially in the last few months, some refugees, as well as local and international actors, felt confused as to what current practice is in place. Some interviewees could not identify any “clear regulation” or strategy, particularly as practices differ from one municipality to the next. In addition, interviewees felt that, in practice, there is a discrepancy between what has been said and what is done. While Turkey has created and tasked new institutions, such as AFAD and DGMM, to manage the enormous influx of people since 2013, the structures

are still new and seem, in the opinion of local experts, overwhelmed. Because of the coup attempt in July 2016, the system has been heavily shaken, with Turkish agencies appearing to be “busy with themselves”. Registration procedures have thus been delayed, irregular and, in some cases, even stopped, leading to frustrations among refugees and creating resentment towards Turkish agencies. Some refugees said the agencies “do not care” and “make rules that exploit Syrians and make their life difficult”. Only if refugees are registered can they access services.

Consequently, transparency on current policy and practice is essential to reduce frustration levels and promote awareness among refugees of their livelihood opportunities, such as access to courses and jobs and the procedures for registration and work permits. Although aid organizations themselves cannot influence the fluctuation of Turkish policies, they can try to cooperate more closely with local authorities in order to increase information sharing and build trust. A positive example was found in the case of a community information centre that puts information sharing at the forefront of its work and disseminates information on policy changes and livelihood programmes available to refugees and local communities. However, several aid organizations stated that cooperation with national and local authorities was difficult because staff had recently changed, access was limited and mistrust was strong on both sides, especially after the coup attempt. Yet, it is only through cooperation and transparency that misinformation and mistrust can be reduced. While aid organizations have developed closer cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Chamber of Commerce, there is still a lack of consultation with the Ministry of Development, despite the common interests affirmed by local NGO workers. Moreover, recent service-mapping workshops by some aid organizations demonstrate that many agencies do not even know what the others are doing. Generally, more exchange between the authorities and aid organizations at national and local level would help to decrease misinformation and increase transparency, which would ultimately reduce resentment on all sides, ease tensions and advance livelihood programming.

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